

Of damp walls and strange sounds by HOPoverhere

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Fluff, Jopper

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-01-24

Updated: 2018-01-24

Packaged: 2022-04-20 16:29:56

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,533

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Joyce hears sounds through the wall again and Hop cooks dinner.

Post Season 2 Jopper fluff.

Of damp walls and strange sounds

Author's Note:

Hey you lovely weirdos. This is my first ST fic, hope you like it :) Absolute fluff of course.

Paperwork was a daunting task, especially when the town occupied him with petty instances of gnome theft and owls mistaking a bad perm for a nest.

The sharp ringtone of the phone awakened him from dozing off over a report on a kids' fiasco of fruit arranged in inappropriate positions at a local vendor's stall.

“Hop!” He knew the startled voice too well.

The line did not go through to Flo, as general Hawkins PD calls usually did; she called his direct line and he knew this was urgent.

“Joyce? Hey, is everything alright?” he asked in a hurry.

There was some rustling on the line and he could hear she was breathing heavily.

“Hop, I- I think it’s back,” she said stammering.

He froze and needed to hear that again. “What? Joyce what’s going

on?”

“I don’t know, I heard something through the wall ...” She said in a fluster. He was already getting up off his chair in panic.

“Can you come over?” she pleaded.

“I’m on my way. Listen, I’ll be on channel 6, reach me through Will’s radio, okay?”

“Okay, okay...” she said in a manner he had unfortunately heard too many times as she clutched the telephone cord tightly.

Hopper rushed out of his office, Flo conveniently handed him the Blazer’s keys without any question or regards as to where he was going or whether he was coming back; it was such a dynamic between them that he enjoyed, and one that Flo had to learn to enjoy and sympathise with through the years.

He arrived hurriedly at the Byers’. There were no calls on the radio, which made him worry even more. Her Pinto was parked outside and the door and windows were all shut closed.

She immediately opened the door as she heard the tyres blazing through the driveway. He was relieved to see her in the doorway and

not have to enter the house with God knows what inside.

“Hop!” she said in a fluster, her mind too occupied and panicked to apologise for dragging him here.

“Hey, what’s going on?” he asked in a low, calming voice, trying to mask his tension as he placed a soft hand on her shoulder.

“I don’t know, I just heard some stuff through the wall.”

Hopper looked at her with fear, his attempts to hide it were in vain.

“Come in, I’ll show you.” She motioned to where the sound had been coming from and stood a foot behind him, his hand prepared on his gun holster.

“It’s probably all in my head, Ho-“

“-Hey! Don’t you dare say that.” He said assertively pressing a hand on her arm.

He studied the wallpaper-clad corridor wall where two years ago had witnessed a burning demogorgon entangled in bear traps.

There were sounds alright, and a damp looking patch on the wall

which looked quite disgusting and not to mention, eery.

She jolted back and stood a good distance away. He was startled as well, but neared towards the wall to hear better, his hand now holding his unbuckled gun.

“Hop, get away!” she said in an unsuccessful attempt to drag him away.

“Wait, wait. Listen.” He instructed attentively. A silence fell between them as they waited to listen to the noise.

“....Shhhit.” She spat out in a disappointed, angry and embarrassed tone.

“What?” he said turning to face her with his hand still on his gun.

“That’s the bloody cheap piping Lonnie had done for the bathroom. I knew it was going to bust one of these days.”

His gaze relaxed and sighed with relief at the rather creepy sound and the worryingly moist and grey patch on the wall.

“That son of a bitch.” He muttered under his breath, rebuckling his gun.

She was avoiding eye contact with him. “God, I’m so sorry Hop.” She said exhaustedly, still in her work clothes after just having arrived home from an 8-hour shift to an empty house with creepy sounds coming out of moist walls.

“Don’t worry about it, I don’t blame you, it scared me too.”

She was shivering with anxiety.

“Come ‘ere.” He pulled her into a hug; they both needed it after that fright.

He could feel her still stiff. “Don’t worry about it. Bad piping scares the shit out of me too.” He said in one of his classic mischievous tones.

It did make her smile and reminded her how big of an idiot he could be sometimes. But he was her helpful idiot.

They disentangled and her shiver was gone.

“Crazy Joyce Byers, ha?” she said in embarrassment.

“Hey, shut up. Come on, you’re exhausted Joyce, you need to get a good nap.”

“Hop, I haven’t had a nap in seventeen years.”

“Well I say it’s just about time then.”

“I couldn’t. What about this damn thing though?” She said annoyedly pointing at the wall where the bust piping ran through.

“Don’t worry about that, I’ll fix it tomorrow, I need to buy new pipes anyway and old Mr Jenkins’ hardware store closes soon.”

She groaned.

“Hey, really, go have a nap, I’ll work on this pipe to at least make the sound stop. I got some stuff in the truck.”

“No, no no. You’ve already had to leave work and came over here for nothing Hop.”

“And you think I ain’t grateful for that?!” He said with a cheeky smile. “It was paperwork day today, you saved me, Byers.”

She produced a slight smile but he could still sense her tension.

“Come on, go lie down, it will be a while till the kids arrive from school. They’ve got AV club today and will be at the Wheeler’s after.”

She was hesitant and anxious, still shaken by the thought of that thing coming out of the wall again and later embarrassed at being outsmarted by a bust pipe.

There was silence again.

“Hey, that thing is gone alright? We’re alright Joyce, Will’s alright. Don’t think it’s all in your head. That crazy shit from the lab is all gone now, and don’t think you’re alone when you hear something like that and get scared. It scares the shit out of me too. But it’s gone, okay?”

She needed to hear that - or something like it anyway - and realised just how exhausted she had been.

“I’m going to be out here, you won’t be alone.”

After much protesting she finally gave in and went to bed.

He felt relieved that she got the opportunity to rest for a while. He did feel uncomfortable, alone in her house while she slept, but decided to make himself useful instead of just sitting around and smoking.

He fixed the bust pipe for the night until he got new pipes tomorrow, trying not to make too much noise in the process. The thought of

leaving was tempting, but he promised her he'll still be there.

As he walked through the kitchen, he noticed a few unstitched pieces of carpet here, a bit of loose curtains there, and quickly got around to making himself busy and fixing some of Lonnies dreadful handiwork. He did not want to intrude but was certain that Joyce had too much on her mind to worry about these things. Not that he had any plans for that afternoon anyway other than munching down the soon-to-be expired boxes of cereal in his cabin with El, who was not too enthusiastic about the idea. 'Breakfast for Dinner' he had called it, like they had never done that before.

After a while Jonathan arrived home from school to find the chief of police screwing on some new window hinges in his house.

"Oh, hi Hop." Jim's presence was not uncommon in their house - he and El had become like family - but Jonathan had never come home to the man doing maintenance work in his socks when his mom was nowhere to be seen.

"Hey, Jon."

"Where's mom? Is everything alright?" He looked panicked.

"Yeah, yeah, she's sleeping. She called earlier at the station. She thought she heard a sound ... She's exhausted, Jonathan. The sound was a bust pipe in the wall where, that thing ..."

Jonathan nodded in understanding - more so to the fact that he and his mom had seen it, unlike Hopper.

“I told her to get some rest.” The boy nodded again silently. Hopper felt uncomfortable in this kid’s house playing handyman when his mom was sleeping. He felt he owed him an explanation as to why he remained there. He stood up from the stool he was leaning on. “Jonathan, I stayed here because I promised her I would be here; I didn’t want here to wake up with noone here.”

“Yea, yea, okay... Thanks Chief.” Jonathan was not sure if he fully took in what this whole deal was, but he knew his mom needed to rest, and was glad that she finally had some time for that. More than a year after Bob’s death and all that happened with Will, this was the first time he saw her sleeping.

“I’ll go check on her.”

Jonathan opened the door carefully and saw that she was in deep sleep, snugly tucked underneath the blankets. He emerged from the corridor and nodded to Hopper that she was alright.

He silently smiled as he screwed the last part of the hinge.

“I guess I better leave now, don’t want to bother you guys any longer. I’ll come tomorrow to fix the pipes.”

“No Hop, stay for dinner at least. She”ll be glad to see you when she

wakes up. And you know she loves to have El over.”

He hesitated a bit, but gladly accepted. “Alright kid, but I’ll make dinner, got it?” It hurt him that this kid had to grow up with a shitty father and having to be the part-breadwinner for the family at a young age.

Jonathan did not try to protest, fully knowing that it would not go well with Hopper.

“I’ll run to the store.” He put on his boots and grabbed his hat.

“You guys like mac ’n cheese, right?”

“Yea, it’s mom’s favourite.”

“I know.” He smiled a bit, the way he could without looking too fussy - he knew Joyce would hate coddling.

He arrived soon after, with a change of clothes and two bags full of pasta, cheese, milk, flour, and an unhealthy amount of bacon. And Eggo’s of course because they could never have enough of those.

Jonathan was preparing to go over to Nancy’s to hang out a while

and drive Will and El home for dinner afterwards.

His heart was pounding as he paced through the house and his room picking up his jacket, keys, and wallet. He felt he needed to just say this to him at least.

He walked past the kitchen, hands in his pockets and his head determinedly aimed down in an awkward manner.

“Right, so I guess the kids and I will be over in about an hour or so.

“Good, dinner will be ready by then.”

“Alright, thanks,” he paused as the large man turned away to continue preparing dinner.

“Hey Hop, I don’t know what’s going on between you and my mom, but whatever it is, don’t hurt her, okay?” There was conviction in the boy’s eyes and he did not mutter a single word.

Hopper felt the life rush out of him. His lips were tight in shock and let out a sigh as he pressed his lips together.

“No kid, I love her.” His voice was soft, with a hint of hopelessness.

There was silence between the two men.

Hopper tried to compose himself. “But she doesn’t know alright, coz’ there’s nothing going on, okay?” He said in a low but assertive voice.

Jonathan nodded knowingly and they shared a respectable nod as he left with a rush out of the house.

Hopper felt his head and chest and heart circling around him. He knew the kid noticed, but he had never actually confronted him about it. He would not do anything about it; she was still grieving Bob and he was not going to be that jerk, and he knew she deserved better than him.

He wanted a beer, a cigarette, a pill, anything at that moment. Luckily he had stopped taking pills when he took El in, so that was definitely not an option. He just took in a deep breath and decided to make himself busy to get his mind off. He was making her favourite dish, after all.

It was the only homemade dish he knew how to cook. It was quite the surprise to El when she first tasted it as it actually had flavour and was not frozen or a TV dinner.

Joyce awoke in the unlit room, with just the light from underneath the door dimly flooding in. She did not know whether she slept for an hour or through the whole night or was it the following morning.

She heard the TV and some clinking of pots and pans in the kitchen. The clock in her room made her realise that she had slept for a good three hours, more than she had ever managed to sleep straight in a night in the past two years.

There weren't any noises of the kids, or Jonathan's music, and it felt strange yet peaceful. Somehow she had not yet thought about the fright earlier in the day.

She got out of her room clad in her warm pyjamas and her old robe.

"Jonathan?" she called as she walked through the corridor and into the living area. She got startled when she saw that Hop was still there, and cooking dinner.

"Hey," he said with a smile. "You slept alright?"

"Yeah, thanks ... Hey, you didn't need to stay here, I feel bad for wasting your afternoon let alone your evening." She said apologetically.

"I wanted to stay, remember?" he said softly.

She smiled her usual sad and apologetic smile, arms crossed as she wrapped her robe tightly around her.

“What are you cooking?” She asked as she moved closer.

“Mac ’n cheese. Well, trying to.”

“Smells good.” She said lightly.

He handed out his half-smoked cigarette to her. She took it casually, like it was routine.

She took in a deep swig of it and put it out in the ashtray, gazing her eyes on him after doing so.

She moved beside him as she let out a sigh of relief out of tiredness, and hugged him from the side.

It *felt* different. It wasn’t a hug like the times she had hugged him before, or a side hug like El does as a ‘thank you’ when he gives her Eggo’s, wrapping her arms around his flabby waist.

There was something different. Her left arm was wrapped around his waist at his lower back while her head and other arm rested on his chest.

It felt different.

He tried not to allow himself to feel different about it. This was still the woman whose boyfriend they both saw getting torn up by creatures from another dimension a little over a year ago. He could not think that it was any different.

Her head rested a while on his chest, the touch comforting for both.

The silence was unnerving. He waited for a response, a release, anything.

Half-sleepily she muttered “Thanks Hop, sorry for wasting your whole afternoon.”

“Don’t worry about it, got all the time in the world for you.”

He planted a soft kiss on her forehead as he took out his arm from under her hug and wrapped it around her.

She breathed slowly and started to look up at him. He sensed the tension but did not move or utter a word. Was she still drunk in sleep? Or was this just out of gratitude?

She moved closer as he looked down into her eyes with a conscious sense of tension and urgency.

Tip-toeing, she kissed him on the lips. Not just a soft peck, but a deep kiss as she leaned into him and caressed his scruffy beard with her

hand, both for issue of balancing and for the gruff tenderness of it all.

He was shocked, but nevertheless ecstatic about what had just happened. Though he tried his best not to show it.

She released slowly, still clinging on to his height.

He looked at her the whole time, to see if she was high, still half-asleep or just plain kidding around.

His brow was furrowed in his usual grumpy manner, with the added sense of caution and skepticism.

She made eye contact with him for the first time in a while. A little half-smile broke on her lips as she waited for a response.

His voice was a whisper. “Didn’t know you felt that way.”

She smiled fully now, almost a shy chuckle.

He now turned to fully face her, his height towering over her small frame. He leaned in and kissed her passionately.

Their rhythm was all janky and clumsy for a while, which she felt him smile about against her lips.

This was long coming.

He urged himself down and hoisted her up on the kitchen counter. Luckily he had kept his unorganised cooking skills away from this side of the countertop.

“Hop!” she said in surprise and slight disgust as she pushed him away.

“What?” he said with a horrified look on his face.

“We are not doing *this* here, right now, with the kids about to walk in that door any minute!” she spoke animatedly pointing her finger at him and the counter and the front door.

“Hey, hey. I just want to kiss you a little, you know, without breaking my back and neck bending down to reach you,” he said holding her still-pointing index finger.

“Oh..” she said with her hair all frazzled as always and her wild eyes looking at his. “I’m sorry, I just.. I don’t know.”

“Hey,” he looked at her, holding her chin up to look at him. “I don’t want to fuck this up, alright? We’ll take it step by step, whatever that means. Okay?”

She nodded apologetically. “I don’t want to fuck it up either.”

He smiled and pressed himself against her again. Their kisses grew steamer as their bodies were straddling each other’s at the end of the countertop. She could feel his hardness against her as he gently kissed her neck.

She started to laugh a little, at the way his beard scratched at her neck; at how she was straddled against him like they were still teenagers; and at how she felt safe for just a minute and did not think some creature from another dimension would get her son again or enter her house walls.

“Don’t leave any marks” she said playfully and quietly, but also concerned at the fact that he could leave a mark and the kids would see it, or that they could come in through the door and find them like that.

“Only where it doesn’t show,” he joked as he returned to her lips and grasped her closer - if that could be possible.

Luckily Jonathan’s car was not in its prime, and it made a loud squeaky noise whenever he slowed in on the brakes. She jolted as she heard the sound, Hop’s arms still wrapped around her waist and in her hair.

“Shit,” she muttered. He smiled his stupidly cheeky grin, feeling proud of himself, as she gave him an annoyed but nevertheless caring glare.

“Those little minx came home early,” he said as she came down the counter, doing his best to hide the arousal under his jeans by pulling down his flannel shirt over it.

She tried to adjust her hair - as if that showed any difference. The car doors where heard being banged closed, with a ruffle of excited words and scattering.

“Shit this isn’t even in the oven yet,” he said while fidgeting around to put the gooey mixture in the dish and into the oven.

“Got distracted?” she asked cheekily. He chuckled with a sigh. Sometimes the world forgot how funny she could be, but not him.

The kids got into the house with a sense of cheeriness (well, El and Will at least), and a load of backpacks and knick-knacks they had taken over to school and the Wheeler’s.

Joyce was still a bit tense, but that was her usual way, either fidgeting around or picking at her hair or the telephone cord or the wallpaper or anything in the vicinity.

Hopper tried not to look Jonathan in the eyes - he knew the boy would notice something. Instead he moved over to ruffle El’s hair. “Had a good day at school, kiddo?”

She nodded and smiled, still not so talkative even after being in school for two months. He never liked talkative kids anyway.

El hugged Joyce, as per their usual greeting. The girl made a weird face. “What’s wrong, honey?” she said in confusion.

“You smell like Dad.” El said with a confused look.

Hop was dumbfounded, could he really not catch a break with her? Joyce was equally jittery.

“Well, that’s because we smoke the same cigarettes and drink the same beer, dear. But you shouldn’t do that you know, ‘coz both smoking and beer are bad for you, okay?” she tried to deviate the subject away, or her thoughts at least.

“Ok,” she said as she and Will went on about their campaign and all things both Hop and Joyce did not understand anything about.

They shot a glance at each other, both red in the face - especially Hop. He avoided looking at Jonathan again, but saw him chuckle a little at El’s statement, and somehow it eased him.

The evening went on with a cacophony of what cool thing Mr Clarke showed them in science class that noone else cared about, and who proved to be bravest in their recent campaign. Dinner was ready after a while and they gathered around the table, the kids setting up the glasses and cutlery in a haphazard way, despite Jonathan showing

them how to set it up a minute ago.

They all sat around and started to eat.

“This is really good, mom!” Will said with a smile.

“Actually, Hop cooked.” She said pointing her fork at him sitting beside her.

“Hopper can cook?!”

“Will!” Joyce spat out at Will’s shocked face.

Hop chuckled, as did Jonathan.

“I’m sorry,” he said apologetically with a low voice.

“No it’s true, this is the only thing he can cook.” El said looking at Will with a sheepish smile. Joyce starts to laugh at the girl’s blunt remark.

Hop had a cheeky grin on his face. “Hey, what’re you talkin’ about? I make the best triple decker of Eggo’s in all of Hawkins.”

“Isn’t that just layers of Eggo’s with whipped cream in between?” Jonathan spoke out for the first time during the dinner.

“Jon!” Joyce calls out still laughing.

Will and El are laughing at Jonathan’s remark, who was not usually the funny type.

“Kid doesn’t talk and that’s the first complete sentence she’s said all night,” he said chuckling to Joyce.

“At least you cook this really good.” The girl said still red in the face with laughter.

“Ah, another complete sentence!” he said as he ruffled her hair for the second time this evening.

Joyce smiled and nudged his knee under the table.

They ate and enjoyed an unexpected evening together. The night was calm, despite the afternoon’s mishap of sounds in the wall. After clearing up, Hop and El started to get ready to leave; it was a school night after all.

Joyce thanked Hop again for his help, a sense of affection present in their exchange that was never fully expressed before. She hugged El good night and gently touched Hop’s arm, with an added soft smile

as they left. He wanted to kiss her goodbye, and did his best to not let himself forget that the kids were there.

The drive home was quiet, only the radio on low volume filling the air with sound. El was rather tired after a packed day.

After a while, she spoke from her sleepy eyes, still in her usual curious mode.

“I know why you did that.” El said in her signature flatness.

He knew this was some sort of trap. The kid did not speak and when she did it was always a question of curiosity. He dared to ask. “Did what?”, keeping his eyes on the road.

“For Joyce. It’s her favourite, mac ‘n cheese.”

“Yea it is kid, she was having a tough day.”

“No, you like her.”

He knew where this was going. He always noticed her asking questions about Joyce, and if she can come over, or they go over to the Byers’.

“Well, she’s my friend, my best friend I guess,” he continued in vain.

“No. You like her like I like Mike.”

Oh here it was, he thought to himself.

“No kid, it’s not like that.”

“Yea, she’s like your Mike.”

“I don’t have a Mike.”

“You have a Joyce.” El said, for the first time looking at him.

He couldn’t help but chuckle at the remark, even though he wanted to have a good talk with her about the Wheeler kid, and was not all too enthused about the conversation they were having at the moment either.

“Hey, what did we talk about, that there’s things you don’t ask someone because it might hurt their feelings or make them uncomfortable or make them worry?”

“Yea?”

“Well, this is one of them.” He played his last card, hoping she would remember the ‘lesson’ he gave her on asking questions (God, she asked a lot of questions) before starting school.

The girl looked at him in shock and disappointment.

“Did I hurt your feelings?”

“No kid, it’s just something we shouldn’t talk about, alright?”

“Why?”

He looked at her again with a look of disapproval. “El.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s ok,” he said as he ruffled her hair.

They drove along the misty road embraced by curtains of trees, and only the dimmed sound of the radio could be heard. Until she spoke again.

“I’m sorry for before. I just want to tell you that if she likes you, it’d

be bitchin'."

He looked at her, mouth slightly open about to chuckle. He tried to deviate away the conversation.

"Ahh, using full sentences again, now *that's* bitchin'." He said with a grin.

She smiled, and knew that he was not just smiling about her use of vocabulary.

A silence fell again in the Blazer, until he spoke this time.

"But yea, bitchin'."

They arrived home and quickly got into their routine, El showered and dozed off to sleep.

He couldn't sleep. The day was... interesting, to say the least.

He felt the kids were onto them; first Jonathan, now El, both of whom rarely spoke but bothered to ask him about his love life. And then there was the 15 minutes he spent with Joyce that they had both been longing for for a long time. Now he really could not sleep.